

## Small Pilgrim Places Journal 41:

### St. John the Baptist, North Baddesley, Hampshire

North Baddesley is a village to the north of Southampton in Hampshire, on the watershed between the Test and the Itchen valleys. Here stands an elegant red brick manor house on a site that in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was occupied by a Preceptory (monastery) of the military order of the Knights Hospitallers. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century a manor house occupied the site, and in 1539, as part of the Dissolution of the monasteries, King Henry VIII granted the manor to Sir Thomas Seymour, brother of his third wife Jane.

Along with the manor came also the church which now stands, complete with a large churchyard, opposite the west front of the manor house, across a winding minor road, in a landscape uncluttered by other buildings. The site of Church of St John the Baptist goes back to the era of the Knights Hospitallers, although it's thought that a Saxon church may have existed here before the Norman conquest, and a church building was recorded here in the Domesday Book of 1086.

Entering the churchyard from the road, I first noticed the brick-built west tower topped with embattlements and lit by small slits as you might see on a castle. The attractive south porch, probably 15<sup>th</sup> century, contains a stone stoup and a bench – very welcome for walkers and visitors.

Passing through the porch into the nave my eye was caught by the modern stained glass in the north window opposite. This is the work of Sophie Hacker, a well-known contemporary artist and Visiting Scholar at Sarum College, Salisbury. The window includes a number of shapes including a sun, a hand and a river, all with rich symbolic meanings. I appreciated being able to approach the window to get a close look at the fine detail in each piece of glass.



The nave, chancel and east window



The window created by Sophie Hacker

A flight of narrow stairs leads to a west gallery, added in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, which serves as an organ loft as well as holding extra seating and giving a good view over the nave and chancel. To the east, a simply carved wooden rood screen dating from about 1600 separates the nave from the chancel. In front of it a table holds information about the Small Pilgrim Places Network, along with a plate of tiny embroidered butterflies which visitors are offered as a memento.

The chancel was rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century; some of the stained glass here dates from this period. The barrel vaulted roof was renovated in 1986 and the crossbeams decorated in rich blue, red

and gold to reflect its medieval origins. Dominating the northeast corner of the chancel is an enormous stone memorial to John More who, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, owned Baddesley Manor. In the opposite corner of the chancel is a large medieval wooden chest, its barrel-top formed from a hollowed-out tree trunk.



War memorial in front of the South porch

I gained lots of fascinating information about the church from an illustrated guide book on display by the south door. It also mentions features outside such as the war memorial cross near the south porch and the graves of those who died in the two World Wars, as well as other tombstones, including one of a poacher hanged at Winchester in 1822. Stepping back out to the churchyard I walked around the many headstones and benches, following a trail of information sheets posted on trees and walls. One, for instance, mentions the lichens to be found here; another tells of the history of weather vanes, which originated as strips of cloth, then later flags, put on buildings to tell the direction in which the wind is blowing. The trail was an entertaining and informative way of getting to know more about the church and its surroundings.

The grass sward in the churchyard is close-mown in some places and has been allowed to grow in others, creating a blend of little nature conservation areas with a good variety of wildflowers, including Ox-eye daisies and Scarlet Pimpernel. I chose a bench in a sunny spot to eat my picnic lunch and enjoy the views over the hedges and across the fields beyond.

Ali Green



Fine views from the churchyard